

The Lieutenant Don't Know: One Marine's Story of Warfare and Combat Logistics in Afghanistan¹

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My experience was not supremely unique or extraordinary and to some degree that's what makes my experience important. The stuff in this book is the experience of the average Marine in Afghanistan. Thousands of Marines did these types of things, and more.²

I. Introduction

The Lieutenant Don't Know: One Marine's Story of Warfare and Combat Logistics in Afghanistan is Jeff Clement's first book.³ Jeff Clement set out to write a book about his experience in Helmand Province, Afghanistan, as a platoon leader for Combat Logistics Battalion 6 (CLB-6).⁴ In many ways, this memoir reads like a diary; the author tells his story; documents his struggles; examines broader questions about the purpose and mission of the war in Afghanistan; and shows the reader that in today's wars there are no front lines.⁵ Through this memoir, Clement details the vital function of logisticians in today's operating environment⁶ while also telling a broader, but nonetheless profound, story about the critical role of leadership in the Marine Corps and the military. This book is honest and compelling; it is a must read for members of the military at every level and for Americans who want to better understand what Marines encounter on the battlefield.

Not only does the reader get to witness first-hand how Clement bravely led his troops in combat, the reader also

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¹ JEFF CLEMENT, *THE LIEUTENANT DON'T KNOW: ONE MARINE'S STORY OF WARFARE AND COMBAT LOGISTICS IN AFGHANISTAN* (2014).

² *Id.* at 18.

³ *About the Author*, JEFF CLEMENT, http://clementjd.com/?page_id=2 (last visited Sep. 2, 2014, 9:32 PM).

⁴ Combat Logistics Battalion 6, Marines, The Official Website of the United States Marine Corps <http://www.clr2.marines.mil/Units/CombatLogisticsBattalion6.aspx> (last visited Sep. 2, 2014, 9:41 PM). (“Combat Logistics Battalion 6 (CLB-6) will train, rapidly task organize, deploy, employ, fight and redeploy in order to provide logistics combat support to a Regimental Combat Team (RCT) and additional Marine Air Ground Task Force (MAGTF) maneuver elements in the RCT's battle space, beyond their organic capabilities, in order to enable continuity of operations.”).

⁵ CLEMENT, *supra* note 1, at 72 (“In the war in Afghanistan, the term ‘front lines’ didn't exist. Units could be attacked anywhere, and large, slow moving logistics convoys were easy targets.”).

⁶ *Id.* (“A combat logistics battalion provides the lions' share of the heavy lifting to provide logistics support needed in combat zones. We were responsible for actually providing support to the infantry units on the front lines. Everyone is important. But the CLB drives the fuel in tankers to the end users, drops off bottles of water to the grunts who need them, and goes out to where the trucks got blown up the retrieve them.”).

benefits from his astute observations about the effectiveness, and oftentimes ineffectiveness, of other leadership styles he encountered throughout his career as an officer. Clement's memoir exposes how profoundly good leadership can impact military operations and how ruinous poor leadership can be on individual morale and unit cohesion.

II. Summary

Clement's memoir takes the reader on a journey through his decision to join the Marines, his commissioning as an officer, his training, and finally his two combat tours with CLB-6 in Helmand Province emphasizing his first tour as a platoon leader.⁷ Unlike many other war memoirs, Clement avoids getting “bogged down in his personal life;” he keeps the story interesting by focusing on what the reader cares about, his experience as a Marine.⁸

After briefly explaining why he chose to join the Marine Corps instead of the Navy,⁹ Clement provides a detailed account of the training all Marine Corps officers receive.¹⁰ “The Marine Corps provides its officers with better training than any other branch, and more of it;”¹¹ this position is hard to refute. According to Clement, a Marine Adjutant¹² actually gets more infantry platoon commander training than an Army Infantry Platoon Leader.¹³

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ *A War Memoir That I Can Actually Recommend*, STANLEY R. MITCHELL, <http://stanmitchell.com/2014/01/31/a-war-memoir-that-i-can-actually-recommend/> (last visited on Sept. 2, 2014, 9:52 PM).

⁹ CLEMENT, *supra* note 1, at 26-29.

¹⁰ *Id.* at 25-60.

¹¹ *Id.* at 49.

¹² *Roles in the Corps, Adjutant*, BEING A MARINE, <http://www.marines.com/being-a-marine/roles-in-the-corps/logistics-combat-element/adjutant> (last visited on Sept. 2, 2014, 9:52 PM) (“Adjutants coordinate administrative matters for Marine Corps staff sections and external agencies at the staff level. They ensure that every Marine in their command has administrative resources both for day-to-day tasks and long-term career progression. Adjutants supervise the execution of administrative policies. They receive and route correspondence, preparing responses to any special correspondence. They also manage their unit's legal matters and monitor fitness reports, among other administrative duties.”).

¹³ CLEMENT, *supra* note 1, at 50.

Through a lengthy and detailed description of the training Clement received which includes Navy ROTC Indoctrination for Midshipmen (INFORM),¹⁴ Career Orientation Training for Midshipmen (CONTRAMID),¹⁵ Marine Corps Mountain Warfare School¹⁶ Officer Candidate School (OCS) where candidates complete the Leadership Reaction Course (LRC) and the Small Unit Leadership Exercise (SULE),¹⁷ The Basic School (TBS),¹⁸ and finally the Logistics Officer Course,¹⁹ it is clear the Marine Corps makes a major investment in training its officers. Typical of all of these courses is an intense focus on developing leadership skills.²⁰ For example, fifty percent of the grade in TBS is based on an assessment of leadership skills and includes a peer review.²¹ Understanding the details of Clement's training helps the reader understand how Clement and the other Marine officers in CLB-6 were equipped for the challenges they encountered in Helmand Province, Afghanistan.²²

In some of the most exciting chapters, Clement takes the reader along on many critical missions 2nd Platoon, Alpha Company, CLB-6 conducted while he was a platoon leader in 2010.²³ The painstaking details about mission planning, preparation, and execution make the reader feel like a member of 2nd Platoon. More importantly, these details help the reader understand the labor intensive, oftentimes tedious, and downright dangerous nature of these missions. It is easy to focus on the plight of the war fighter, the

infantryman on the front lines of a small outpost.²⁴ People tend to forget that those infantrymen need supplies: food; water; fuel; and ammunition in order to survive and be mission effective.²⁵ Clement does a stellar job of detailing how these supplies are actually delivered in a war with no front lines while exposing the dangers these heroes encountered.²⁶

III. Trained to Lead

Tactical training is important,²⁷ but what is equally impressive about the training Marine Officers receive is the emphasis on developing leadership skills throughout every phase of training.²⁸ When Clement arrived at CLB-6 as a young Lieutenant, he was already armed with many of the tools he would need in order to be a successful leader.²⁹

In a particularly powerful excerpt, Clement reflects on the leadership training he received from an instructor at OCS. With purpose and intention, Clement applied three principles of leadership in his new position as a platoon leader:

Know yourself. Self-awareness and humility combined yield selflessness, . . . Know your Marines. Know who they are, look out for their welfare, and validate them as members of the team, . . . Lastly, know your shit. Be technically and tactically proficient. Bold actions and ownership! Nobody will follow someone who is incompetent.³⁰

Clement wrote down this advice and throughout his first deployment as a platoon leader it was clear that he lived by this ethos.³¹

¹⁴ *Id.* at 25.

¹⁵ *Id.* at 26.

¹⁶ *Id.* at 31.

¹⁷ *Id.* at 41.

¹⁸ *Id.* at 50.

¹⁹ *Id.* at 60.

²⁰ RP 0103—PRINCIPLES OF MARINE CORPS LEADERSHIP, *available at* <http://www.tecom.marines.mil/Portals/120/Docs/Student%20Materials/CREST%20Manual/RP0103.pdf> (statement of General C. B. Cates, 19th Commandant of the Marine Corps) (“Leadership is intangible, hard to measure, and difficult to describe. Its quality would seem to stem from many factors. But certainly they must include a measure of inherent ability to control and direct, self-confidence based on expert knowledge, initiative, loyalty, pride and sense of responsibility. Inherent ability cannot be instilled, but that which is latent or dormant can be developed. Other ingredients can be acquired. They are not easily learned. But leaders can be and are made.”).

²¹ CLEMENT, *supra* note 1, at 50.

²² *Id.* at 72 (“CLB-6 Deployed to the Helmand Province just as Marine Expeditionary Brigade-Afghanistan (MEB-A) began to push to the north of the province, supporting the offensives for Marjah, Musa Qa’leh, and Sangin in 2010 and, during the second deployment a year later, the push to Kajaki in 2011.”).

²³ *Id.* at 91–236.

²⁴ *Id.* at 253.

²⁵ *Id.* at 72.

²⁶ *Id.* at 253 (A Company encountered almost one hundred Improvised Explosive Device (IED) attacks and countless combined arms attacks. Nearly half of the company received a traumatic brain injury (TBI) from IED attacks.)

²⁷ *Id.* at 50 (“Every Marine is a rifleman, and every Marine officer has to be prepared to be a provisional infantry platoon commander.”).

²⁸ *Id.*

²⁹ *Id.* at 143 (“TBS teaches lieutenants to always maintain an external focus; one of the harshest criticisms a lieutenant could receive was to be ‘internal.’ The point is to create a mindset where officers immediately focus on taking care of their Marines and defeating the enemy, instead of focusing ‘internally’ on fear and self-preservation. The training worked.”).

³⁰ *Id.* at 64.

³¹ *Id.*

Throughout this work, Clement was self-reflective, placed his Marines first, and was a proficient combat logistician. It is easy for an author to write a book that is self-congratulatory; the author, after all, gets the final say. But the candor used by Clement lends credibility to his story and gives the impression that he really was striving to be a good leader and for the most part, he succeeded.

Two examples of his effective leadership style resonate. First, is the fact that Clement's biggest fear in Afghanistan was not of his own death; his biggest fear was losing one of his Marines.³² The second is the great lengths Clement went to in order to provide cold "near beer"³³ to his platoon members after completing their final mission before redeployment.³⁴ Both examples embody the principle of "[k]now your Marines. Know who they are, look out for their welfare, and validate them as members of the team."³⁵ The first act illustrates that as a leader, Lieutenant Clement placed his Marine's welfare above all, including his own survival. The second act may seem trivial, but Clement's efforts to reward his troops and acknowledge their sacrifice with a cold beer, even if it was non-alcoholic, speaks volumes about his leadership style and his desire to validate his troops as members of the team.³⁶

Throughout this book one thing is clear, all of the time and money that was put into training Lieutenant Clement was well worth it. However, there were also disappointing examples of leadership failures, particularly institutional failures, detailed throughout this book that serve as good teaching points for future leaders.

IV. The Lieutenant Don't Know³⁷

Clement highlights leadership failures he encountered and how they impacted him personally and his Marines as a unit. The most glaring leadership failure Clement encountered was the lack of a defined mission in Afghanistan.³⁸

³² *Id.* at 109 ("Every time the roster was read off, I was nervous that somebody's name would be followed by silence instead of a voice saying 'here.' That was, no kidding, my biggest fear in Afghanistan.").

³³ Near beer is defined as "any of various malt liquors considered nonalcoholic because they contain less than a specified percentage of alcohol." The definition of near beer can be found at <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/near%20beer>.

³⁴ *Id.* at 235 ("One of my greatest triumphs was designing the improvised refrigerator that I had in my truck . . . I wanted to hand each truck a cold beer to toast our success as we rolled 'through the wire' . . . with our deployment basically done. I needed the beer to be cold. Necessity is the mother of invention.").

³⁵ *Id.* at 64.

³⁶ *Id.*

³⁷ *Id.* at 64, 171.

³⁸ *Id.* at 253 ("Nobody ever told me why I was going to Afghanistan. Sure,

Throughout the book, Clement touches upon the impacts fighting a war without a defined mission or purpose has on troops.³⁹ What's the mission? Why are we here? What are we trying to accomplish?⁴⁰ No one ever answered those questions.⁴¹ And when Clement's troops asked, all he could say was "the Lieutenant don't know."⁴² Through his own frustration and the frustration of his Marines, Clement effectively illustrates the risk to morale of sending troops to war without a defined mission.

V. Freedom is Outside the Wire⁴³

More subtle leadership failures were revealed through Clement's detailed description of some of the major logistics missions he conducted from planning to execution. Most notable were his interactions with the battalion and the battalion staff members. From Clement's perspective, it felt like the battalion was only seeking to further its own interests, often times at the expense of the company.⁴⁴ His criticisms of what appeared to be arbitrary staff requirements, general insensitivities to the dangers faced by his Marines outside the wire, and the perception that the battalion was only looking out for itself, are all important critiques worthy of consideration.⁴⁵ This memoir skillfully illustrates that military leaders at all levels should be cognizant of how their actions, policies, attitudes, and decisions are perceived by both subordinate units and individual subordinates. Clement does an excellent job of explaining how detrimental it can be for a subordinate unit and individual unit members when it appears the higher headquarters is only looking out for itself.⁴⁶

I knew our unit's mission was to go resupply other units, but nobody ever came out and briefed our unit on *why* any of those units were really there in the first place.").

³⁹ *Id.* at 171 ("Damn, sir aren't they just fighting us because we're here to fight? If we just left, would they just stop fighting?" The Lieutenant don't know, but it sounds like a damn good question.").

⁴⁰ *Id.* at 193 ("Were they fighting us because of jihad, on ideological grounds, or because we were invading their home? Would I act any differently if we switched places?").

⁴¹ *Id.* at 253.

⁴² *Id.* at 171.

⁴³ *Id.* at 195. This phrase "became a refrain for the Marines of Alpha Company. The often times overbearing chain of command gave the Marines no respite from petty requirements while they were aboard Camp Leatherneck."

⁴⁴ *Id.* at 131.

⁴⁵ *Id.* ("There was a definite feeling in Alpha Company that the rest of the battalion really didn't understand what it was that we did, or how to best support us (or support us at all, as the case was). Marines joked that the real enemy was not outside the wire, but in the Battalion HQ.").

⁴⁶ *Id.* at 97 ("I felt the battalion forced me as the platoon commander to accept the responsibility of bending and breaking rules, even though many of the leaders knew exactly what they were forcing me to do to complete the

One of the most shocking examples of flat-out bad leadership is when Clement was ordered to unload his convoy's emergency fuel reserve at an outlying forward operating base (FOB) before heading back to his home base, Camp Leatherneck.⁴⁷ The battalion operations officer ordered Clement to offload his emergency fuel in order to show how quickly the battalion could move fuel. On the trip back to Camp Leatherneck, the convoy ran out of fuel because of delays from weather and Improvised Explosive Device (IED) attacks. Without its emergency reserve, they were nearly stranded outside the wire, all so the battalion staff could brief better statistics about fuel delivery rates. Only through the ingenuity of the Marines on the ground were they able to siphon enough fuel from broken-down vehicles they were towing to make it back to base safely.⁴⁸

The valuable lessons gleaned from the stark contrast between good and bad leadership demonstrated throughout this memoir make it relevant to leaders at all levels and in all institutions.

VI. Conclusion

More than a book about a single officer's experiences in Afghanistan or the struggles CLB-6 endured in Helmand Province, Jeff Clement tells a valuable story about individual and institutional leadership. Although seemingly unintended, this book offers rare insight into the importance of leadership in the armed forces. On the ground, leadership can literally mean the difference between life and death and as Clement illustrates, leadership truly provides the foundation for every aspect of military life particularly in a combat zone.⁴⁹

mission. If something went wrong, it would be my fault.”).

⁴⁷ *Id.* at 219.

⁴⁸ *Id.* at 220.

⁴⁹ *Id.*